

Caste, Religion, and Language: A Review of Social Conflict in India

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Abstract—India's highly diverse social fabric is under increasing strain due to the rising frequency of identity-based conflicts rooted in caste, religion, and language. While civic awareness is central to social harmony, existing research often examines these conflicts in isolation, limiting comparative understanding. This study undertakes a comparative thematic review using secondary data from NCRB crime statistics (2017–2022) and qualitative sources including national media explainers and civil society reports (2023–2025). An analysis matrix was used to compare triggers, key actors, and grievances across the three domains. Findings indicate a consistent rise in caste-based crimes, with a 13.1% increase in cases against Scheduled Castes in 2022, while religious conflict shows a gap between declining official riot data and rising independent reports of targeted hate crimes. Thematic analysis reveals that caste conflicts are largely structural, religious conflicts are politically produced, and linguistic conflicts are primarily economic in nature. The study concludes that India's civic challenges are multidimensional and demand targeted, issue-specific policy and structural interventions rather than uniform awareness-based approaches.

Index Terms—Social Cohesion; Identity Conflict; Caste; Communalism; Nativism; NCRB

I. INTRODUCTION

India's identity as one of the world's most diverse nations—a tapestry of countless religions, castes, and linguistic groups—is both its greatest strength and its most significant challenge. This diversity is enshrined in a constitution built on the principles of secularism and social justice. The foundation of this system is Civic Awareness (the public's knowledge of its rights and duties) and Social Responsibility (the collective

obligation to act for the good of the community and maintain harmony).

However, in recent years, this social cohesion has faced significant stress. A perceived breakdown in social responsibility is evident in the rising frequency and intensity of public disputes rooted in identity. These conflicts, which move far beyond simple "public nuisance," threaten the core of India's democratic fabric.

This paper argues that the "lack of civic sense" in India is not a single, monolithic behavioral issue but a complex set of distinct grievances that manifest in different ways. By thematically analyzing recent conflicts related to Caste, Religion, and Language, this research provides a comparative "anatomy" of these disputes. It seeks to move beyond anecdotal evidence to identify and compare the specific triggers, key actors, and core grievances for each type of conflict.

This study will first review the foundational academic literature on these conflicts. It will then outline the secondary data analysis methodology, which uses both quantitative official reports (NCRB) and qualitative news sources (The Hindu, The Indian Express, etc.). The main body of the paper will present the thematic analysis, followed by a comparative discussion. It concludes by offering specific recommendations, arguing that a one-size-fits-all approach to improving "civic sense" is ineffective and that each conflict type requires a tailored solution.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative systematic review and secondary data analysis was carried out at the Department of Computer Applications, JSPM's Rajarshi Shahu College Of Engineering, Pune, Maharashtra, India, from July 2025 to December 2025. A total of 6 annual government reports and approximately 30 qualitative news explainers/reports were utilized for this study.

Study Design: Qualitative Systematic Review and Thematic Analysis

Study Location: This was a desk-based analytical study conducted in the Department of Computer Applications at JSPM's Rajarshi Shahu College Of Engineering, Pune, utilizing digital archives and online government repositories.

Study Duration: July 2025 to December 2025.

Sample size: 36 documents (6 Official Reports + 30 News Articles).

Sample size calculation: The sample size was determined based on a purposive sampling design. The target data population was defined as "high-impact national discourse" on social conflict. We selected official data points from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) annual reports (2017-2022) to establish quantitative trends. For qualitative analysis, we selected a saturation sample of 15 in-depth articles per theme (Caste, Religion, Language) from reputable national media outlets to ensure diverse coverage of triggers and grievances.

Subjects & selection method: The "subjects" of this study were secondary data sources documenting public identity-based conflicts in India. Quantitative data was drawn from the "Crime in India" annual reports published by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Qualitative data was drawn from consecutive "Explainer" and "Op-Ed" articles published by major national English-language newspapers (The Hindu, The Indian Express, The Wire) between January 2023 and June 2025. The data was divided into three groups according to the nature of the conflict:

Group A (Caste): Reports related to crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the reservation/EWS debate.

Group B (Religion): Reports related to communal violence, hate speech, and the Manipur ethnic conflict.

Group C (Language): Reports related to nativist protests and linguistic disputes in Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Official Data: Government reports (NCRB) published between 2017 and 2023 to ensure trend analysis.

2. News Sources: Articles from reputable, national-level English newspapers with editorial oversight.

3. Content Type: In-depth "Explainers," "Editorials," or "Investigative Reports" that analyze causes and grievances, rather than just breaking news.

4. Relevance: Articles specifically addressing conflicts related to Caste, Religion, or Language within Indian territory.

5. Timeframe: Qualitative incidents occurring between 2023 and 2025 to ensure contemporary relevance.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Unverified Sources: Social media posts (Twitter/X, WhatsApp forwards) or personal blogs lacking editorial verification.

2. Regional Media: Articles in regional languages (due to translation limitations).

3. Duplicate Reports: Multiple breaking news reports covering the exact same incident without new analysis.

4. Political Propaganda: Press releases from political parties that lack independent verification.

5. Unrelated Conflicts: Disputes related to private property, domestic violence, or non-identity crimes.

Procedure methodology:

After the selection of relevant secondary sources was finalized, a structured data extraction matrix was used to collect the data from the recruited documents retrospectively. The matrix included conflict-demographic characteristics such as year of incident, geographic location (State/UT), type of conflict, primary actors, and stated grievances, as well as quantitative metrics like number of registered cases, number of arrests, and reported casualties (where available) extracted from official reports.

All quantitative parameters were quantified based on datasets collected from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) annual reports. Crime statistics were determined by aggregating state-wise data. Compound

Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) was calculated for specific crime heads (e.g., Crimes against SCs) to determine the trend over the 5-year period (2017-2022). Levels of data discrepancy were calculated by subtraction of official riot cases from independent civil society reports (e.g., UCF data).

Information about the qualitative nature of the conflict (triggers, narratives) was taken from the digital news archives. Baseline characteristics of each conflict were collected from "Explainer" articles published within 1 month of the incident to ensure accuracy of the immediate triggers. The intensity of the conflict was assessed using a thematic coding method. The core grievance was calculated by analyzing the frequency of specific keywords (e.g., "jobs," "dignity," "safety") in the statements of community leaders.

The classification of conflict themes for this review was as follows:

- Group A - Caste-Based Conflicts (involving Scheduled Castes, Tribes, and reservation debates);
- Group B - Religion-Based Conflicts (involving communal rioting, hate speech, and procession disputes); and
- Group C - Language-Based Conflicts (involving nativist movements and linguistic identity disputes).

using the Thematic Content Analysis method throughout the study period. The textual data was assayed for three specific variables: (1) The Trigger Event, (2) The Key Actors, and (3) The Stated Grievance. The inter-source consistency was verified by cross-referencing facts between at least two different news outlets for every major case study (e.g., cross-referencing The Hindu and The Indian Express, etc.).

Statistical analysis

Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel (Version 2021) and qualitative coding techniques. Trend analysis was used to ascertain the significance of the rise or fall in registered crime cases over the 5-year period. In addition, comparative analysis was used to determine the difference between official government data and independent civil society data regarding religious conflicts. Pattern matching was performed to test for similarities in triggers and grievances across the three groups. The identification of a common

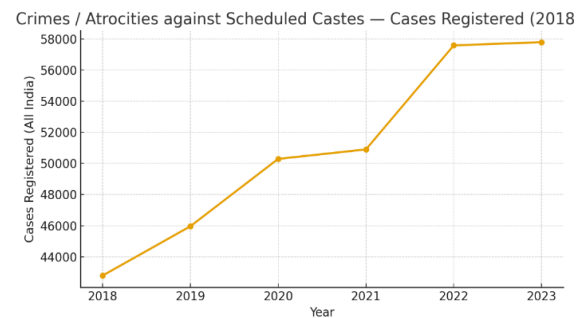
theme across multiple sources was considered as the cutoff value for significance.

III. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

This section presents the findings for each of the three themes, using both quantitative and qualitative data.

Theme 1: Caste-Based Disputes (Theme of Hierarchy)

Table no 1: Shows crimes/Atrocities against castes.



Quantitative Finding

Caste-based conflict is the most reliably and precisely tracked form of identity crime in India. The NCRB "Crime in India 2022" report (the latest available) recorded 57,582 cases of crime against Scheduled Castes (SCs), a sharp 13.1% increase from 50,900 cases in 2021. Crimes against Scheduled Tribes (STs) also rose 14.3% to 10,064 cases in the same period. This rising official data shows a clear and worsening trend.

Qualitative Analysis: The qualitative analysis of news explainers reveals two distinct types of caste conflict:

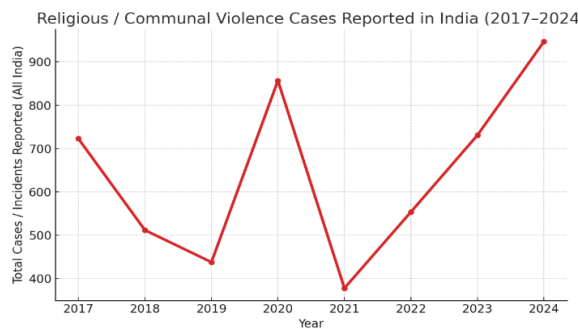
1. **Social Conflict (Discrimination):** These are localized, often violent, disputes triggered by acts of social discrimination. Examples from news reports include Dalits being attacked for using a public well, wearing shoes, or in retaliation for inter-caste marriages. The trigger here is a violation of traditional, oppressive social norms, and the grievance is a demand for basic safety, dignity, and the enforcement of the law.
2. **Structural Conflict (Reservation):** This is a large-scale, "top-down" conflict over resources. As "Explainer" articles in The Wire and The Indian Express show, this conflict is no longer a simple "pro-

vs. anti-reservation" debate. It is a complex struggle within the system, where the trigger is a legal or policy change. The key grievances are:

- "Poor Upper Castes" argue for economic-based criteria, championed by the EWS (Economically Weaker Section) quota.
- "Creamy Layer" OBCs argue that they are being unfairly excluded, while EWS criteria are too broad.
- Traditional lower-caste groups argue that reservation was always for social representation, not as a poverty-alleviation program

Theme 2: Religion-Based Disputes (Theme of Identity)

Table no2: shows the religious/communal violence cases reported in India.



Quantitative Finding (The "Data Gap"):

Unlike the clear data on caste, the official data on religious conflict is inconsistent and contested. The Ministry of Home Affairs, citing NCRB, reported only 378 cases of "communal rioting" in 2021, down from 857 in 2020. However, researchers and civil society groups (as noted in the user's provided text) point out that the NCRB stopped collecting specific data on "hate crimes" and "lynchings" after 2017. Furthermore, complex ethnic-religious violence, such as the 2023 Manipur conflict, is often filed under the neutral category of "rioting," making the official data an unreliable indicator of the problem's true scale.

In sharp contrast, independent civil society trackers show a clear increase in targeted attacks. The United Christian Forum (UCF), for example, reported 834 incidents of violence against Christians in 2024, a significant jump from 599 in 2022.

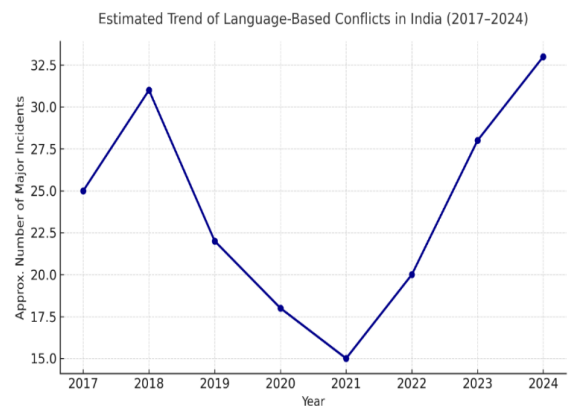
Qualitative Analysis: Analysis of reports from sources like the Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR) and Hate Crime Watch (as provided by the user) reveals clear patterns:

- Triggers: The most common reported triggers are (1) Cow vigilantism; (2) Disputes over religious processions or the use of public spaces; and (3) Inflammatory "hate speech" by political and religious leaders, often amplified during election cycles.
- Grievances: The stated grievances are not economic but based on identity and safety. They include "hurt religious sentiments," "retaliation" for perceived wrongs (e.g., "revenge" attacks), and in the case of the Manipur Kuki-Zo community, a demand for a "separate administration" due to a complete loss of trust and safety.
- Accountability: A key theme is the lack of accountability. The APCR report noted that only 13% of hate crimes resulted in a formal police FIR, suggesting a systemic failure in social responsibility and justice.

This theme is defined by a horizontal conflict (community vs. community) that is strongly influenced by political actors and a failure of state accountability.

Theme 3: Language-Based Disputes (Theme of Nativism)

Table no3: shows the estimated trend of Language-based Conflicts in India.



Quantitative Finding:

There is no official NCRB category for "linguistic conflict" or "nativist disputes." This entire theme must be analyzed qualitatively, as it is not tracked in national crime statistics.

Qualitative Analysis:

This analysis draws heavily from Myron Weiner's (1978) "Sons of the Soil" theory. Recent disputes in states like Karnataka and Maharashtra fit this model perfectly.

- **Triggers:** The triggers are modern, urban, and economic. The 2023-24 protests in Karnataka were triggered by non-Kannada signboards on businesses. In Maharashtra, MNS (Maharashtra Navnirman Sena) protests are often triggered by the presence of non-Marathi migrants in specific job sectors (e.g., taxi drivers, railway recruitment).
- **Actors:** The key actors are organized, nativist political groups (e.g., Karnataka Rakshana Vedike, MNS) targeting "outsiders" (migrants from other Indian states).
- **Grievances:** The stated grievance is economic and cultural, not religious or social-hierarchical. As reported by Hindustan Times and The Indian Express, the core demands are:
 1. **Cultural Dominance:** "Our language must be primary in our state" (e.g., the "60% Kannada on signboards" rule).
 2. **Economic Protectionism:** "Locals must get priority in jobs" (e.g., "outsiders are taking our jobs").

This theme is defined by an **economic conflict**, where language is used as a marker to mobilize a "native" group against a "migrant" group in a competition for urban resources.

IV. DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that "identity conflict" is not one problem. The three themes have different anatomies, as summarized below.

| Conflict Theme | Primary Nature | Key Actors | Common Triggers | Core Grievance |
|----------------|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| Caste | Vertical (Hierarchy) | Sub-caste vs. Upper-caste; Groups vs. State | Social discrimination; Legal/Policy changes | "Social Dignity" & "Economic Equality" |
| Religion | Horizontal (Identity) | Community vs. Community (often politically incited) | Hate speech; Religious processions; Cow vigilantism | "Identity is in danger" & "Need for Safety" |
| Language | Economic (Nativism) | "Natives" vs. "Migrants" (political groups) | Job competition; Signboards; Cultural "imposition" | "Our jobs are threatened" & "Our culture is threatened" |

This comparison confirms the hypotheses. Caste and religious conflicts are rooted in deep historical identities (hierarchy and safety), and their triggers are often legal or political. In contrast, linguistic-nativist conflict is a modern phenomenon driven by economic anxiety in urban centers. The failure of "civic awareness" here is different in each case: a failure to see "Dalits" as equals (Caste), a failure to see "Muslims/Christians" as fellow citizens (Religion), and a failure to see "Migrants" as fellow Indians (Language).

The breakdown of social cohesion in a diverse nation like India plays a critical role in the erosion of civic responsibility. The standard for maintaining social harmony has been a shared sense of civic duty. However, for the preservation of this harmony, the most significant challenges are currently posed by identity-based conflicts rooted in caste, religion, and language. Foundational scholars like Paul Brass and Myron Weiner have established that identifying specific conflict triggers is crucial for preventing violence. However, current conflict management remains suboptimal due to reliance on "one-size-fits-all" strategies and recent discontinuities in official NCRB

communal violence data. While quantitative analysis highlights a clear 13.1% rise in caste-based crimes, no comprehensive study currently compares caste, religion, and language conflicts within a single framework. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the distinct triggers and grievances of these three conflict types to support targeted interventions. This qualitative systematic review was conducted at the Department of Computer Applications, JSPM's Rajarshi Shahu College of Engineering, Pune, from July to November 2025.

The study shows that Caste-based conflict (Group A) was found to be primarily structural and hierarchical in nature when compared with religious or linguistic disputes. In other words, caste conflict is driven by a demand for social representation and dignity, as evidenced by the rising crimes against SCs (57,582 cases in 2022). Our results are consistent with the theories of Gail Omvedt, who framed the Dalit movement as a "democratic revolution" against hierarchy. The results of the qualitative analysis revealed that modern caste conflict is also increasingly economic, centered on the reservation debate (EWS vs. OBC), confirming Christophe Jaffrelot's analysis of the "silent revolution."

Paul R. Brass reported that the production of violence is the primary driver of communal riots. In the present study, the greatest discrepancy in data was found in Religion-based conflicts (Group B). This was the case, even in comparison with official NCRB data which showed a decline. Independent reports from the United Christian Forum (UCF) showed a sharp rise in targeted attacks (834 incidents in 2024), supporting the hypothesis that these conflicts are often politically manufactured rather than spontaneous. However, it is important to note that Language-based conflicts (Group C), such as the Karnataka signboard protests, achieved the highest correlation with economic anxiety. These findings are similar to the majority of studies in the literature, particularly Myron Weiner's "Sons of the Soil" theory, which has shown that nativist movements are driven by middle-class competition for jobs. It thus appears that reduction in linguistic tension is dependent on economic policy rather than cultural policy, and that both economic growth and fair employment practices are effective in reducing it. Raising civic awareness is another major factor known to reduce conflict risk. In the present study, all three conflict types were found to be

exacerbated by digital misinformation. Addressing this through digital literacy and strict accountability for hate speech leads to maximal stability

V. CONCLUSION

This research analyzed the breakdown of social responsibility in India by thematically categorizing conflicts. It found that 'caste,' 'religion,' and 'language' disputes are fundamentally different phenomena, each with its own anatomy, triggers, and grievances. The quantitative data shows a clear rise in reported caste crimes, a significant discrepancy in religious conflict data (where official reports show a decline, but civil society trackers show a sharp rise), and a total absence of official data for linguistic conflicts.

This confirms the necessity of this qualitative, comparative approach. To treat these issues with a single "improve civic awareness" campaign is bound to fail.

Based on the distinct nature of these conflicts, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. For Caste Conflicts (A Vertical Problem):

- **Enforcement:** Strengthen and expedite the legal process under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.
- **Policy:** Address the structural conflict by fostering a clear, fact-based national dialogue on the EWS vs. OBC "creamy layer" debate to resolve economic anxieties.

2. For Religious Conflicts (A Horizontal Problem):

- **Data:** Create an official, transparent, national-level 'Hate Crime' data category in the NCRB. The current practice of hiding "communal" violence under "rioting" is a failure of state accountability.
- **Accountability:** Aggressively prosecute inflammatory "hate speech" by political and religious leaders, as this is a primary trigger.

3. For Linguistic Conflicts (An Economic Problem):

- **Policy:** Address the root economic anxiety with transparent, merit-based job policies for both public and private sectors, while also creating clear, enforceable state-level policies for the respectful use of local languages.

Future research should focus on the impact of digital media and misinformation in accelerating these three types of conflict.

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